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ABSTRACT

Leadership roles performed by teachers after implementation of a school-based management (SBM) plan in Florida are described in this report. Telephone interviews with principals of each of the 33 participating schools were conducted to identify the leaders of the participating school bodies, or "cadres." Findings indicate that 75 percent of the most active members were classroom teachers. That two-thirds of them were elected indicates voluntary involvement despite an increased workload. However, a comparison with districtwide statistics indicates that administrators are overrepresented in the cadres, underscoring the cooperative nature of the shared decision-making process. (LMI)

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SHARED DECISION-MAKING IN SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO BECOME ITS LEADERS

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Introduction

In 1987 the Dade County Public Schools embarked on an innovative project referred to as School-Based Management. The purpose of School-Based management (SBM) was to allow teachers and other school-level staff to become more active in school-level decisions, thereby enhancing their feelings of professionalism. Finally, teachers would have a say in how their schools were run.

This radical approach to managing schools made a lot sense. After all, teachers were in the classroom everyday observing the learning process of their students. Daily contact with students enabled them to observe the effects of school-level decisions on the primary reason for the existence of schools: the students. They were in an excellent position to see the effects and implications of various decisions. Traditionally, this valuable source of information was overlooked when it came to making decisions. Teachers lounges were filled with comments on how this decision and that new policy were going to run into trouble, etc.

The Program

In order to tap the resources, knowledge and experience teachers could bring to school-level decisions a two-fold program was implemented in 33 original SBM schools. These schools volunteered for the project by at least a two-thirds vote of the faculty. They were given little direction except for the instructions that they were to design a shared decision-making council of some sort and they were to plan at least one innovative project for the school. While no specific guidelines were given, a series of informational meetings and workshops were offered to the schools to help them get started. What evolved were 33 unique SBM programs with 33 different shared decision-making (SDM) bodies.

The SDM bodies are called different names depending on the school. The most frequent name, however, is "cadre" and for the purpose of simplification this name will used throughout the paper.

The initial year in the project was characterized by much trial and error learning. Teachers were charting new territory and had few role models to pattern themselves after. That first year taught teachers and researchers alike a few key points. First, teachers in the cadres had increased work to do. Not only were they responsible for their regular duties but now had extra cadre meetings to attend to and also any work that sprung from these meetings. Second, teachers were thrust into roles as administrators in the sense that they were making managerial decisions and implementing new innovations. Although as professionals they had considerable education and experience, almost none of that prepared them for these administrative responsibilities. After all, teachers took content and/or education courses in college, not administrative courses. And working autonomously in their re-

spective classrooms, teachers are unaccustomed to working in groups. Clearly, there was a lot to learn. The changes were indeed radical.

Leadership Roles

School-based management has been in place in the Dade County Public Schools for almost four years now. New schools have been added to the project and teachers and administrators alike are learning the ropes. Given the dynamics of SBM and SDM described above, this researcher set out to find who the real leaders of the cadres were. Malen, Ogawa and Kranz, In press, reviewed the existing literature on SBM. Using the governance theory, they set about to look at how influence relationships were altered in the context of SBM. Their conclusion was that although SBM afforded greater input for teachers, the decisions were still being made by the traditional power-holders - the principals.

This researcher set out to determine who were the leaders of the cadres in the original 33 project schools. What were the characteristics of those involved. One hypothesis was that since the cadres demanded additional time in an already heavy schedule the leaders of the cadre may be those who do not have classroom responsibilities. One point of clarification should be made here. Although the term teachers has been used throughout this papers it also includes other professional, non-administrative staff. This would include counselors and media specialists. These types of staff, it was theorized, might more likely be involved in leadership roles because their time was more flexible that the classroom teacher's.

Another hypothesis suggests that those teachers with special roles would also emerge as leaders of the cadre. This includes the teacher who serves as the school's union steward. By definition, union stewards sit on all cadres. Another type of teachers with the special role is that of the cadre chair. As leaders of the cadre, would they most naturally be considered one of the most active members of the cadre or do they take a laid back approach to their role?

With these hypotheses in mind an interview schedule was devised by researchers with experience in the SBM project. The principal of each of the 33 original schools in the project were interviewed by telephone to get their opinions as to who the three most active members in the cadre were. In addition to the name of these active members, their position in the school was asked for. The union stewards and cadre chairs were ascertained. Inquiries as to the size and composition of the cadres were also made.

Findings

In terms of who the most active participants in the cadres were the results were somewhat surprising. It was anticipated that classroom teachers might not be among the most active partici-

pants because they had heavy and structured classroom duties that would hinder their work the cadres might involve. Yet, fully 75% of the most active members were classroom teachers. Just over 16% were non-classroom based. These included media specialists, lead teachers and teachers-on-special-assignment. Over 8% were administrators. Thus, three-fourths of the most active members of the cadre were classroom teachers.

How does this compare to the breakdown of these three groups districtwide? Just over 90% of the professional staff in the schools are classified as classroom teachers; under 6% are classified as non-classroom based; and 4.19% are administrators. It can be seen then that these two sets of proportions do not match. Clearly, administrators still tend to dominate the cadres when viewed in this manner. There may be several reasons for this finding. First, at least one administrator is required for a school's cadre. Given that the average size of a cadre is 12.87 members, one administrator on the cadre would comprise 7.7% of the total membership. Second, it may indicate that turning over power to a group, especially one that is new to the world of school-level decision-making may be more difficult to implement than first thought. Third, teachers may already feel burdened by the traditional classroom workload and not want to take on any more responsibility.

Another way to look at the characteristics of leadership in the cadre was to calculate the percentage of those most active who are also union stewards. Here, 14.6% of the most active members were union stewards. While membership on the cadre is required for union stewards they are not necessarily directed to take a leading role. Yet, inherent in being the designated union steward is leadership responsibility in some ways. So it is not surprising to see the union stewards taking an active role.

Still another way to look at most active roles is to calculate how many cadre chairs were listed as most active. Almost one-third of the cadre chairs were listed as most active. This leads to another question: Who are the cadre chairs? Seventy-eight percent of the cadre chairs are classroom teachers; leaving 22% who do not have classrooms they are responsible for. This suggests that some classroom teachers are committed to the SBM concept and see it is a way to enhance their professional duties. It is interesting to note that not one administrator holds the cadre chair.

The final analysis for this paper looked at whether or not those considered the most active in the cadre were elected. By definition, administrators and union stewards are assigned to the cadre, not elected. Yet with the increased demands for work the cadre brings it would be reasonable to assume that most cadre members who are active are so by choice. The data revealed that two-thirds were elected. Thus, it would seem that although school-level personnel know there is extra work to be done for school-based management they do so willingly.

Summary

Participation in the cadre increases the teacher's workload. Yet, fully three-quarters of the most active cadre members are classroom teachers. Coupled with the finding that most cadre chairs are also classroom teachers, it would appear that teachers are assuming an increased workload that SBM/SDM brings. The presence of administrators on the cadre underscores the fact that SBM/SDM is a cooperative arrangement designed to add teachers into the decision-making process rather than turn it over to them entirely.

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